

Chronic Lower Back Pain management for older adults

Chronic Lower back pain. What causes it?

Chronic Lower back pain (pain lasting more than 12 weeks) is the most common musculoskeletal problem that older adults report. The most common diagnoses that older adults are given for the source of their pain is Degenerative spinal disease, which is a broad diagnoses that suggests parts of the spine have degenerated due to old age, which cause pain (Barney & Perkinson, 2016). This causes pain that many older adults complain about, but there are still other culprits for lower back pain which are included below.

- Degenerative disk disease
- Degenerative facet disease
- Spinal fractures
- Herniated disk
- Osteoarthritis
- Osteoporosis

How does back pain hinder independence?

Pain is not a fun feeling and can keep individuals from experiencing pain during their activities of daily living (ADLs) such as bathing, grooming, and dressing. The pain can be so great that individuals may not perform instrumental activities of daily living such as cleaning, cooking, or activities such as laundry. Individuals with back pain may exercise because of the pain, and as well as social activities. Individuals will avoid an activity or less the activity that causes them pain which makes sense, because they do not want to feel pain. Individuals may ask others for help, leaving them without engaging in the activity themselves.

Who helps individuals with back pain?

- Physicians- To get a proper diagnosis of back pain it is important to see a primary care physician or an orthopedic doctor. The doctors may order imaging such as X-ray, CT, or MRI to help diagnose back pain (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and stroke, 2020). Once diagnosed doctors could suggest by case:
 - NSAIDS such as Advil or ibuprofen
 - Analgesics such as acetaminophen and aspirin
 - Muscle relaxants
 - Topical pain relief such as creams, gels, or patches
 - Antidepressants
 - Surgery
 - Steroid or cortisone injections
- Physical therapists
 - Programs to strengthen muscles in the core that support low back
 - Improve mobility

How can Occupational therapists help with Chronic low back pain?

Earlier, it was mentioned how back pain can hinder independence in daily activities. That is where occupational therapists come in. Occupational therapists work to increase your engagement in your daily routine despite your diagnoses (Caruso & Chan, 1986)

Treatment Approaches from an Occupational Therapy Student

Positional/Body mechanics

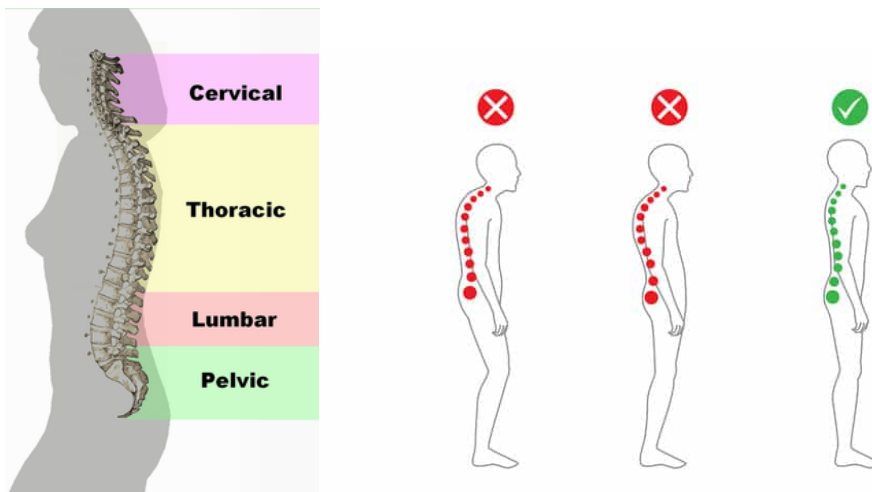
Ways that you are moving your body, or body mechanics, could be detrimental to your lower back pain. It is important to think while doing activities “Is this making my pain worse or better” as well as noticing if your back is not rounded. A rounded back can cause pressure on the low back ultimately causing you pain (Caruso & Chan, 2017).

Keep these tips in mind!

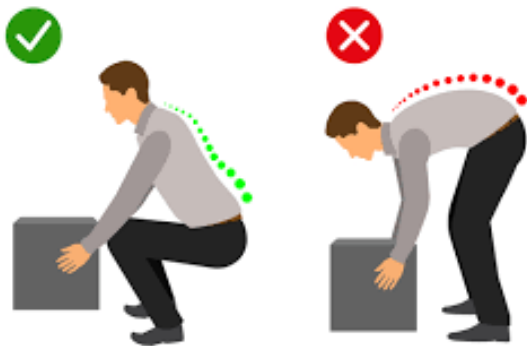
1. Keep a neutral spine

There are 3 natural curvatures to the spine that you should try your best to keep in line when doing daily activities (NIH, 2020).

- Cervical (the curve turns slightly inward)
- Thoracic (the curve turns slightly outward)
- Lumbar (the curve turns slightly inward)



2. When picking something up, Bend the knees not the hips or back.



3. Use a footrest to help keep a neutral spine (recliner chairs are good for this)



Assistive technology that can help with back Pain

Reacher

Reacher's are a tool that allow you to pick things up by simply grasping the handle of the device with the claw wrapped around the thing you want to pick up. This is a great alternative for those individuals who cannot bend at the knees to pick something up and want to maintain the body mechanics that were mentioned earlier.

Link to get one is here: https://www.amazon.com/Foldable-Mobility-Reaching-Extension-Mazarine2/dp/B07GTWWJB5/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=reacher&qid=1591915530&sr=8-3



Sock aids

Putting on socks and shoes is a main activity where individuals run the risk rounding their back to do the activity, which ultimately causes more back pain in the long run. To maintain body mechanics, these devices can help alleviate pain from these daily activities.

Sock aids help the individual put on socks without having to bend over or maneuver the legs in a way that is painful. If you cannot maintain proper body mechanics while putting on socks, this is for you!



Link to purchase: https://www.amazon.com/Vive-Sock-Aid-Compression-Assistance/dp/B07285V3VW/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?dchild=1&keywords=sock+aid&qid=1591916950&sr=8-2-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUEyVDcxWkJXN09QWTJTJmVuY3J5cHRIZElkPUEwMDU4MzA2MkxXMjJEUKJGSzYzSSZlbnNyeXB0ZWRBZEIkPUEwMTc4MTYxMTgyR0I0VlVLUFNVOSZ3aWRnZXROYW1lPXNwX2F0ZiZhY3Rpb249Y2xpY2tSZWRpcmVjdCZkb05vdExvZ0NsaWNrPXRy

Shoehorns

Shoehorns help individuals to put shoes on while keeping the back of the shoe firm so that you do not have to bend over and use poor body mechanics!



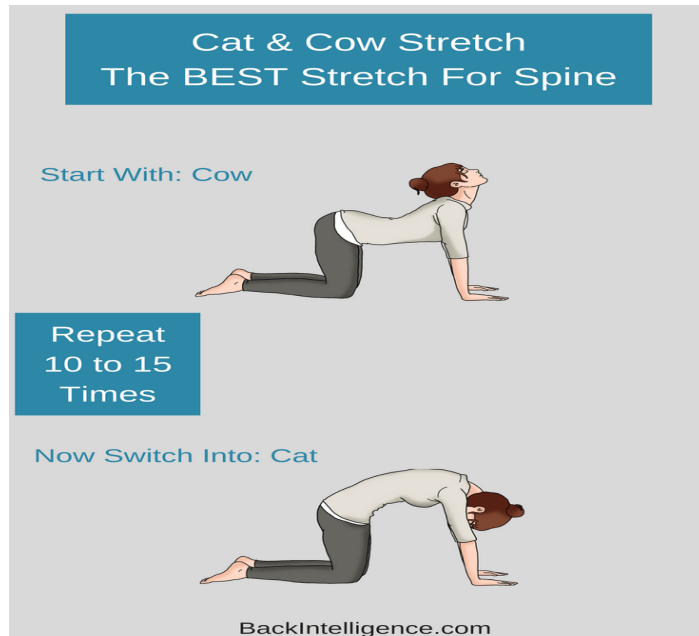
Link to purchase: https://www.amazon.com/Handled-Shoehorn-Pregnancy-Stainless-Silicone/dp/B07872KD1N/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?dchild=1&keywords=shoe+horn&qid=1591918231&sr=8-2-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUEwMjIwOTg5RDZUZUEJPOVRZWFBWJmVuY3J5cHRlZEFkSWQ9QTA0MTMxMjFYMDJIN08zOVpDQ1Amd2lkZ2V0TmFtZT1zcF9hdGYmYWN0aW9uPWNSaWNrUmVkaXJlY3QmZG9Ob3Rmb2dDbGljaz10cnVl

Physical Exercises that help! STAY ACTIVE!

Individuals with back pain may shy away from exercise because they feel as it makes their symptoms worse, but the less active an individual is, the more likely they are to experience pain (Anheyer et. Al, 2017). It is best to strengthen the muscles of the back, but also the abdominal muscles.

Cat and Cow Stretch Instant Relief

Start with your hands directly underneath your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips. When breathing in, bring the stomach towards the ground as the picture shows and bring your neck high. When breathing out, round your back towards the sky and bring your neck down. This will help relieve pain in the lower back. If you cannot get on your knees, here is a video for a standing cat and cow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naYmO7AuY4I>



There are many different exercises out there for you! Here are others!

Here are links to other exercises that will help strengthen the back:

<https://eldergym.com/lower-back-pain-exercise/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZZfeQ6beMw>

Relaxation and Mindfulness Techniques

Ten to forty minutes of relaxation, or mediation, is proven to be one of the most effective methods to treating back pain (NIH, 2020). Meditation is an ancient practice to focus on your body and mind as a whole, and brings your awareness to your muscles and breath.

When you have a pain flare up, here are some tips from the University of Wisconsin Madison:

1. Taking a moment to pause (instead of automatically reacting to the challenge/pain);
2. Noticing what is happening “right now” in the body, mind, and heart (the thoughts, images, emotions, and sensations that are occurring);
3. Focusing on noticing the sensations of breathing, of the air moving or the belly rising and falling with each breath;
4. Expanding one’s awareness to the body and mind as a whole; and, finally,
5. Making a mindful decision about, as opposed to reacting automatically about, what to do next (if anything). [21] [22] [34]



Other Resources on Mediations that can be used:

<https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/tools/mindfulness-meditation-for-chronic-low-back-pain/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOBAzVrp8vk>

How do these solutions improve occupational engagement?

These solutions help individuals with increase occupational engagement in activities and participation. Positioning can help with mobility in the home and the community, as well as increasing engagement in ADL’s. Assistive devices can increase participation in self-care tasks of putting on shoes and socks, as well as basic ADL activities. Lastly, mental and physical exercises can increase participation in quality of life, self-care, and ADL’s.

References

- Anheyer, D., Haller, H., Barth, J., Lauche, R., Dobos, G., & Cramer, H. (2017). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Treating Low Back Pain: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Annals of internal medicine*, *166*(11), 799–807. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M16-1997>.
- Barney, K. F., & Perkinson, M. A. (2016). *Occupational therapy with aging adults: Promoting quality of life through collaborative practice*.
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